

YOUNG WOMEN... YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

...BY ORGANIZING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

When violence against young women is a problem in your community, *you* can make change. With determination, a small group of supporters and some organizing skills, you *can* make a difference and you *can* help to seek justice for young women. Start off by analyzing who is getting victimized and how. Is it rape or teen dating violence? Is it street harassment or police brutality? Is it middle school youth? 14-18 year olds, etc.? You will need to determine if they're being victimized in the home, at school or in the community. For example, you may be aware of young women who have been raped, battered in relationships or assaulted in their homes and on the streets. It's difficult to know exactly where to start to make the most difference... so once you've thought it through carefully, it's important to narrow down your focus.

For purposes of learning, let's narrow it down and say you're interested in your school's response to teen dating violence. The more specific you are and the more you know about the situation you're facing, the better you'll be able to address it.

The next step is to bring together the resources your community needs to address your schools response to teen dating violence. **Begin with focus groups:** seek out supportive community members, parents, school officials, organizations...and other young women. When you involve "stakeholders" – people who care about safety for young women in your community – you involve those who are willing to "act" on their behalf.

Stakeholders might include:

- ♀ Other young women
- ♀ Students/male allies
- ♀ School administrators, including the principal and deans or school board members
- ♀ Teachers and other staff working in the school
- ♀ Parents
- ♀ Local neighborhood groups
- ♀ Law enforcement
 - The commanding officer or a DARE officer
 - The community policing unit sergeant
 - The designated police-school liaison officer

FOCUS GROUPS:

Don't be discouraged if focus groups are small to begin with. *Many big things have been accomplished by organizing small groups of people.*

(For learning purposes, let's say you want to organize a School Safety Task Force to address safety for victims of teen dating violence)

ASSESSMENT:

- ♀ Begin an assessment of the problem by interviewing key groups of people to identify priority safety issues. Focus groups could happen in the school with teachers, at the law enforcement center with officers who are interested...even in the cafeteria with a group of interested students. Bring another person with you to help with the interviews and to record responses.
- ♀ When you interview someone, explain your reasons, your concerns and goals for increased safety. *Ask for their help.*
- ♀ When you have enough people informed and interested, form committees if possible, and assign people to interview members of their own constituency. For example, a teacher could meet with and interview other teachers.
- ♀ Surveys can be developed and presented in your focus groups. Once surveys are completed, responses should be carefully documented.
- ♀ Explain that you will gather information, suggestions, and input from several sources in order to plan for and take action to improve your schools response to teen dating violence.
- ♀ Explain that all responses will be confidential but will be compiled in order to come up with an action plan that will eventually be presented to a broader school community to begin efforts to protect victims of school dating violence.
- ♀ Thank people for their willingness to participate and their willingness to help.

IDENTIFY PROBLEMS:

- ♀ Ask each group you interview to identify at least three key areas that would improve responses to teen dating violence in your school. You will want to ask each group to identify at least three concrete problems victims of teen dating violence are faced with in your school.
 - Brainstorm ideas: Ask the group to state what the problems are
 - Write down every idea, regardless of how insignificant or “silly”. It's important to flush out all possibilities to identify problems.
 - Then ask the group to prioritize and identify only three concrete problems. (Example: possible priorities might be: outdated school policies, lack of resources, and couples attending the same classes when one partner has a restraining order)

IDENTIFY RESOURCES:

- ♀ Note what the problems are and ask: Who can help solve the problem?
 - Who can update outdated school policies?

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- Who can update and provide adequate resources for victims?
- Who can enforce a restraining order on school premises?

♀ Always document responses to help maintain your focus.

IDENTIFY UNDERLYING CAUSES:

- ♀ After problems have been identified, ask **why** the problem (safety for victims of teen dating violence) is jeopardized on school premises.
- Reasons might be: updating policies has not been seen as a priority; there has been a lack of awareness about the prevalence of teen dating violence in your school; or school officials were never notified of restraining orders on individuals.

IDENTIFY SOLUTIONS:

♀ Ask each group for practical solutions to the problem. Brainstorming and prioritizing again can accomplish this. Be sure to record ideas for solutions.

SUMMARIZE:

- ♀ Re-state and document the goals of your organizing efforts.
- ♀ Document who you interviewed and how your information was gathered and prioritized
- ♀ **Summarize** what you learned through the interviews/surveys, from each group, and for each specific problem category, including:
- Noting the top three reasons victims of teen dating violence are not safe in your schools
 - Noting the possible causes
 - Noting which problems the school can address itself or other individuals or agencies can address them
 - Noting the possible causes
 - Which people are available and other resources that could help solve each problem
 - Possible strategies to resolve problems.
- ♀ **Summarize conclusion/next steps:** Begin to focus on developing a consensus around the top three problems to be solved first, then the next three.

You should hold an open meeting with the school community to discuss the report. Your assessment report should give a clear and comprehensive picture of what the safety problems are in your school for victims of teen dating violence -- *not just your perceptions, but those of everyone.*

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After the school community has expressed their comments about the assessment report your "School Safety Task Force" should set up problem-solving meetings.

HOLD A COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING MEETING

Now that members of the "School Safety Task Force" have met with key groups in the school community to assess your school's most important safety problems for victims of teen dating violence, you are ready to begin solving these problems.

BUILD YOUR "TEAM"

- ♀ Building cooperative working relationships among members of the School Safety Task Force is crucial to getting things done and meeting your goals. Every member of the Task Force is part of a team and should share the responsibility for making your school a safer place for victims
- ♀ Your meeting leader may be you, a parent, the principal, dean, school safety officer or another Task Force member who is trusted and is good at setting a tone for making sure everyone in a group gets involved. The contribution of each person is important.
- ♀ Collaborative problem-solving will enable everyone on the Task Force to agree on a specific safety problem to be tackled first, its causes, the people and resources available to attack it, and the strategies that must be implemented to solve the problem. Each Task Force member will have a specific role to play and tasks to perform in order to meet your goals

PREPARE THE MEETING

- ♀ Coordinate dates so everyone involved can attend the meeting. Schedule at least three hours in a comfortable room. You will want flip charts or a chalk board for note taking. Provide refreshments.
- ♀ Good community organizing requires on-going contact with Task Force members. If possible, mail out reminders *and* make phone calls or a face-to-face invitation. Maintain regular contact with members to keep them motivated and interested.
- ♀ Provide each Task Force member with a copy of the assessment report listing the problems you are all trying to address.
- ♀ Prepare a written agenda, for example:
 - Introductions
 - A review of the problems
 - Purpose of the meeting
 - Ground rules
 - Meeting objectives
 - Strategies identified to solve specific problems
 - Next steps
 - Set future meeting dates

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CHOOSE AN ATTAINABLE GOAL

- ♀ At the beginning of the meeting, review the problem list and pick one or two problems from your list to tackle first.
- ♀ For example: 1) Outdated school policies, 2) Lack of resources
- ♀ You should also identify problems that can be addressed at a later date.
- ♀ Discuss what has been tried in the past, what worked, what didn't work
- ♀ Choosing an attainable goal with the resources you have available will ensure success. Early success builds morale and maintains interest in your Task Force. It will also spread throughout your community and may attract involvement from other community members.

DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM CLEARLY

- ♀ Once one or two problems are identified and agreed upon, you need to understand and uncover every detail as to why teen dating violence victims are not safe in your school. Discuss again exactly what is happening, who is it happening to, where is it happening, how long it's been happening and why it's happening.
- ♀ For example, everyone may agree that teen dating violence is a problem but they may not be aware of the prevalence, who the victims are and where safety is needed the most. Is the best strategy to expel a student who has a restraining order the answer, or are there other strategies that might help keep a victim safe?
- ♀ Use the Task Force's problem definition then brainstorm the underlying causes. Write them down.
- ♀ This process should include causes that result in victims not being safe: where, in the school, are victims vulnerable? Is there a shortage of staff to ensure safety? Who is unaware of restraining orders? Are there personnel issues that need addressing? Are there staffing issues that raise concern? Are there people not doing something?

IDENTIFY KEY PEOPLE AND RESOURCES

- ♀ Identify who the key people are that could help solve this problem.
 - School officials?
 - Law enforcement?
 - Hall monitors?
- ♀ Identify resources needed to solve this problem.
- ♀ Identify what barriers exist that prevent these key people from effectively keeping dating violence victims safe. For example: Are school officials aware of restraining orders on particular students? Are counselors and other school staff educated about the prevalence and dynamics of teen dating violence? Who has the authority to update school policy and who has the information needed to ensure safety for victims? Are there training needs?, etc.

- ♀ Begin another brainstorm session to strategize how the School Safety Task Force can overcome these barriers. To ensure success, it's important to involve key people who can help strategize. For example: You might ask the hall monitor what kinds of behavior he/she sees and ask for his/her input.
- ♀ Ask key people to get involved and provide their input in seeking solutions.
- ♀ Summarize and document specific strategies identified by your Task Force to solve the problem. Prioritize strategies.

SPECIFY YOUR ACTION PLAN:

- ♀ After prioritizing your strategies, it's important to examine them carefully, including strategies needed to overcome barriers.
 - What tasks need to be accomplished?
 - Where and when will tasks and activities take place/
 - When will tasks be completed?
 - Who will be responsible for each task?
- ♀ Carefully outline each step. Ask the Task Force members to decide who will do what, and when. Ask for specific dates when certain tasks will be completed.

TIME TO ACT

Once tasks have been assigned, it remains critical to keep Task Force members motivated and involved.

Maintain regular communication – call, have face-to-face contacts, write letters.

REPORT YOUR ACTIVITIES TO THE LARGER SCHOOL COMMUNITY:

- ♀ You are now ready to take the information and action plan decided on by your School Safety Task Force and present it to a broader community.
- ♀ Prepare a written report that addresses:
 - Who the School Safety Task Force is;
 - What you hope to accomplish;
 - How you researched needs, organized a collaborative problem-solving approach to ensure safety for teen dating violence victims, and what the top prioritizes are based on your research/assessment;
 - Explain how you gathered information and how you defined the problems;
 - Explain how the Task Force determined priority problem areas to address and how they determined how goals could be met to ensure success;
 - Explain specific steps identified by the Task Force to address first, when you hope to have them implemented, and when the Task Force would like to begin;

- State the end results the Task Force would like to attain in concrete detail.
Example: The Task Force would like to increase safety for victims of teen dating violence in your school by updating school policies, raising awareness about the prevalence of teen dating violence and ensuring resources are readily available for victims;
- Identify other priority problems that can be addressed at a later date;
- Stress the importance of community members coming together to take action, cooperative efforts by your Task Force and the creative problem solving that was done to develop concrete solutions;
- Provide written reports for all Task Force members.

It's important to remember that other problems that were identified by your group can be addressed at a later time. *It's easy to take on too much too soon but the process outlined above increases the likelihood of success by maintaining a specific focus.*

As you move forward with your action plan, you will begin to see obstacles you failed to identify during your early planning stages. These obstacles can be re-visited by your group periodically. It's important to continue meeting on a regular basis to address issues as they arise, to maintain cohesiveness with your group, and to maintain involvement.

Once you are satisfied (for example) that school policies are updated and resources are made available for teen dating violence victims, you can move on to another problem area.

Young women...you CAN make a difference.

If you feel like your project has been a success and you have effectively sought justice for victims of teen dating violence – **contact the media**. Share your success.

You will inspire other young women to take action. You will inform your community and most significantly, you will deserve the recognition.

Good luck!

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